

353 Days by orphan_account

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Language: English

Characters: Mike Wheeler

Status: Completed

Published: 2018-07-02

Updated: 2018-07-02

Packaged: 2022-04-22 05:07:08

Rating: Mature

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 1

Words: 5,550

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Day 1. Day 18. Day 49. Day 101. Day 201. Day 297. Day 321. Day 337. Day 353.

353 Days

Day 1

He can barely open his eyes. They are so heavy, and sort of sticky, too. Sticky in the way that even your eyes can sometimes manage to feel like the most disgusting thing about your entire body, although they're actually not.

No, the most disgusting thing about his body is not the way his blood-shot, crusted eyes are feeling in his face right now; it's the ball of firm, knife-impersonating guilt that's rolling around in his stomach, in this instant. Guilt and shame. And not just in his stomach, oh no. Everywhere, the guilt is everywhere. Under his dry palms, behind the hurting muscles of his neck, around the overheated lump of his brain, which is currently trying to figure out why his eyes feel so icky today. It must have something to do with the shame.

That last part is obviously not true. Mike's brain is perfectly aware of the situation, thank you very much.

Yesterday was the worst day in his entire life, and that's why nothing about his sore throat or his numb bones or his overheated, pulsing brain with the disgusting eyes in the front even remotely matters.

What matters is that she's gone.

She's gone, and maybe she didn't even have to be gone; maybe there would have been about a million other options in the terrible, momentarily haunted classroom yesterday that could have prevented her from leaving like that, but none of them have crossed his mind in time, or even by now, and so she disappeared.

The most incredible, interesting, unbelievably cool person he's ever met died in his math classroom.

And on Monday, when the shady government assholes who scared her so much have cleaned up in his school once again, everyone will go back into that classroom to do some math in it. And it will probably look all normal and maybe even shiny and none of their

classmates will have the tiniest, vaguest idea that a hero sacrificed herself in there to save them all.

Mike's horribly swollen eyelids do that thing they sometimes do when he's on the verge of crying, they close on their own accord as if to prevent the tears from falling. But they do anyway, finding a way down his cheeks like rain finds the ocean, and the anger in Mike's chest is a force that could have ripped telephone books apart or create the loudest battle cry heard in Hawkins, Indiana, for several centuries. But no anger in the world could possibly bring her back, and that's the most anger-inducing thing about all of this.

Day 18

The Christmas mood everywhere is as wrong as the English homework, the family dinners, the TV ads and the tiny arguments with Nancy. Everything feels way too normal, way too predictable, way too brutally real. Mike still lives his life, still jokes around with his friends and all that, but when it comes down to it, something's off. He sometimes thinks that if he didn't see Dustin and Lucas for a few days, he might start to wonder if she was ever even there, ever even real to begin with. He might start to stop believing in her, as if she was just some kind of imaginary friend he'd grown to old to believe in for. He might literally go crazy.

And maybe he already has. He's talking to her on the walkie every night, after all. Every single night.

But it's merely been seventeen days. Seventeen days, that's nothing! If she'd survived that weird, black explosion with the Demogorgon, somehow... If she'd managed to just reappear somewhere else, she might have made it. And if she is clever, which she is, then she'd know that she couldn't just come over and wait for him in the blanket fort. Although that would be amazing. But no, she'd surely realise that the bad men still have their eyes and ears on the house, and that the only way to reach Mike safely for now is to use some sort of radio equipment.

If she ever makes it back, he'll be waiting for her. He'll be right there.

Day 49

Do you know what the weirdest part is?

He's not really losing his stamina here. Not at all. He knew her for, like, a week. The hardest, most horrible, most exciting perfect week in the history of weeks, maybe, but even that means just a couple days when it comes down to it. And he's thirteen. Thirteen-year-old boys should probably be able to cope after 49 days of her absence, they should be able to get over this sort of trauma or at least try not to make it look so fucking obvious. Hell, even his teachers,- even his Dad!- seem to notice how messed up Mike really is.

Which is bad, but recently, Mike seems to be a little too messed up to even care all that much about what anyone else thinks of him.

Although he hasn't told the others that he's still talking to her. He tells himself that's because there's nothing to tell them, yet, but obviously it's mainly the shame once again, the fear of seeing the pity in their eyes and of having them start some kind of intervention on him if they knew.

"Mike, dude, come on!", Lucas would say, patting Mike on the shoulder like he sometimes does, his eyebrows furrowed like an old man's. "You can't keep on doing this, it's not healthy."

Maybe Will would understand. Will is suffering, too. Everyone is suffering, really. Not for the same reasons, and not with the same intensity, but they all are.

Nancy, Jonathan, Mrs. Byers, ...

Even Dustin and Lucas, although they really could try to be a bit more extroverted about the fact that they are missing El, too. Mike knows that his friends miss her, but maybe if they showed it more openly, and wouldn't just be discussing her superpowers so much instead, then maybe Mike could stop feeling so fucking alone for just one second.

Well, either that, or maybe he's just making up random reasons to complain, once again. Mike's become good at that, lately. He's become good at a lot of things.

Glaring. Cursing. Drawing violent little doodles into his exercise books from time to time, preferably about Mr. Higgs, and preferably in situations where Mr. Higgs is close enough by to get Mike into detention for it.

Mike never used to get himself into detention. Or anyone else for that matter. But then again, he never used to be this angry, frowning face in the mirror, either.

Mike never used to steal money from Nancy, but maybe he and his friends are getting too old for D&D adventures, or something, because all their group ever seems to do at the moment is go to the amusement hall. Mostly to spend bits of Nancy's savings there, and whatever Dustin can find in his couch.

The amusement hall is awesome, but there's something about writing D&D campaigns that always calmed Mike down quite a bit; had him feel creative, and proud of himself.

Maybe he stopped feeling as connected to their group as he used to, as well. He didn't just feel like a part of their group, come to think of it, no, sometimes Mike almost felt like a sort of leader, in a way.

Not just because Mike's their D&D master, and definitely not because he has any real sort of authority over them, but just due to the sense of simplicity he's sometimes managed to bring into the room.

Will can be so quiet sometimes. Almost too shy to really speak his mind in certain situations. And Dustin and Lucas become like an old, married couple now and then, bantering over the silliest nonsense just for the sake of having something to do. But Mike often found it easy to focus, he'd been an optimist, a voice of reason whenever they had decisions to make, and from time to time this sense of purpose seems almost as far gone as Mike's sense of humour by now.

In all honesty, Mike is so far from being okay that he doesn't even feel like the same person any more. Like someone replaced parts of his mind with someone else's ways of thinking at one point, and those foreign personality parts are somehow growing, as time stretches into eternity.

An eternity of loss and unfairness and one entirely without her.

Day 101

"Hey, it's me."

No answer.

"It's Mike."

"I'm... I just want you to know that I'm still here. I...-"

He sighs.

"I won't give up yet. Even if I have to wait another hundred days, El. I'd never just give up like that, even if that's crazy."

No answer.

"I guess this is what my Mum must have felt like. In the waiting loop last week, I mean, when she ordered our new vacuum cleaner... You know, because no one's ever answering in those waiting loops either, the stupid music just goes on and on and on forever and...-"

He tries to chuckle, but it sounds hollow and vague. He's not sure if he can actually do this for another one hundred days, but the thought of giving her up entirely hurts more than everything else. More than any injury or humiliation or wave of fear. Just... more than anything he knows.

"It's not that I don't like talking to you.", he assures her, into the silence. The lights are low and the quiet hissing of the walkie against his ear makes him dizzy.

"It would just feel a lot easier if I knew for sure that you are there, El..."

No answer, no answer, no answer.

"You don't need to... tell me where you are, if you don't want to.", he allows, for what must be the millionth time in 101 days.

"I just need something to know that you're safe, El."

He drops the back of his head against the wall behind him. It doesn't make things more comfortable, really, but at least he's not sitting there in the exact same position as he does every night, right now. Maybe moving around would help him, somehow.

But right then, he feels something. Something warm, something familiar, something distantly near and absently close and he looks straight ahead, out of the blanket fort into the room.

There's nothing. No shadowy figure, no ghost, no physical sign of anything being different, and yet the room has changed for him, has become invisibly brighter and unobservably better.

"Eleven?", he breaths, listening closely to his own raging heart and the utter quiet.

Nothing.

"El, if you are here... please tell me.", he begs, feeling so tired of all of this and so alone with it, too.

Sometimes he's not sure if he should openly cry so much, in moments like these, or better try to keep it together in front of hypothetically-present El. But thinking about that doesn't really help, because either way the outcome sucks. Either he should allow himself to cry, because she's really gone, or she's listening and he's looking pretty pathetic, crying so terribly much all the time.

But then he scolds himself for even wasting energy on such musings, seeing as her being alive would be the greatest, most healing thing that could ever happen to him. And the fact that he misses her every day of his life like she's his sole focus is not embarrassing, could never be embarrassing, could never be something she'd judge him for in a billion years. She'd understand. If she's actually here, which sometimes felt like an actual possibility and mostly like a hopeless, stupid dream, then Eleven would understand what he's been going through. She just is like that. El always understood.

So Mike cries. He lets the tears wash over his dry cheeks and buries

his face against his knees, and he cries. And it feels like... It feels like she's crying, too.

Which is perhaps just another hopeless, childish dream, but right now Mike needs it. He needs to feel close to her, even if it's fake.

Day 201

"Michael, don't talk to your mother like that.", Ted Wheeler says during dinner, sounding almost as bored as he is, and Baby Holly utters a friendly burp to go with it.

"It's just not happening, Mum, I'm sorry.", Mike says, glaring at her for even thinking in that direction.

"I don't see why you are making such a fuss about this, Michael!", his mum complains. "It's just for a couple days, do you really have that much to discuss with your friends that you can't lend someone your walkie talkie for a few days? That seems pretty immature to me!"

"What does she even need it for?", Mike snaps, not backing down from his point in the slightest.

"Judy's daughter Miranda has this school project, apparently... You've met her, she's one grade under Nancy, I think. Miranda and her friends are trying to do an "international market research"-thing for their social sciences club, she said."

"An international...-?"

"Market research, yes. You know, they compare different products from different countries and see which nations are the best when it comes to sticking to customer promises. They're comparing technical devices, too, so I offered her to borrow your walkie talkie for a couple days, that's all.", Mike's mum shrugs, apparently refusing to accept any blame.

"Why would you do that?!", Mike exclaims, furious. "You can't just borrow someone other people's stuff, Mum!"

"Good grief, Michael! It's not such a big deal!", Mrs. Wheeler shoots back, annoyed at this outrage. "I thought you of all people would

approve of an interesting experiment like that."

"I need my radio equipment, Mum! Couldn't you have borrowed her the microwave instead? Or the TV, or something?"

"Hey!", Mike's dad complains at this suggestion, not very happy about that idea.

"Mike, now you're really being ridiculous.", his Mum scoffs. "If you want to be such a little kid about it, you don't have to lend her your walkie talkie. Although it does seem very silly and egoistic."

"Thanks Mum.", Mike replies, coldly, totally ignoring the rather frosty parts of her statement and finishing his mashed potatoes.

If she thinks she can take this away from him, his Mum has clearly no idea whatsoever about what's really going on in his life. Of course she doesn't. If she wants to take his one inefficient connection to El away from him, his mum would have to do it over Mike's dead body.

He'd go into the basement to do his homework after dinner, and later he might tell El about all of this. Maybe she'd be happy that he's managed to keep his walkie. You know, in case she is still alive somewhere and constantly listening to his nonsense in the way she probably isn't. And maybe she'd feel good if he promised her to stick around for another hundred days once more.

Day 297

"Mike, I can't believe I actually have to say this, but you have to try harder in school. This...-", his Mum is pointing at the test in front of her on the kitchen table, the one graded with a C- in English, "This is not you."

Mike rolls his eyes, but keeps them focused on the kitchen floor. His Mum sighs, sitting down next to him at the table.

"It's not because of the grade. I don't care about the grade. Everyone is allowed to have a bad day now and then, Michael, but the way you've been acting these past few months... It concerns me. You understand that, don't you?"

She's looking at him all intently and motherly, trying to reach out to him, trying to get through, but unfortunately, she won't.

"Look, Michael.", she says, placative. "If you work through this – if the next test is a lot better than this one, and if there's no more rude behaviour from you for a while... You and I can go to the cinema together next Saturday, we can watch whatever you'd like. Or... or one of your friends could stay over, or I can give you some extra money for the amusement hall." She sighs. "I don't know. I just want you to snap out of this phase, Michael. Just for a few weeks, would you?"

Mike swallows. He doesn't want to be like this, either, and he doesn't want to make his Mum worry, but she frankly doesn't get it. No one ever really gets it. He has to work through this alone, even if he's walking on the spot.

He just leans over and hugs his Mum. It's not easy for her, and he knows that. But telling her everything wouldn't make anything better, it would only make things a million times worse. His parents are "patriots". They were on the wrong side of the fight, the day it all went down; they helped "Papa" and his people look for El. A part of Mike gets so angry when he thinks of that, even angry at his Mum, and sometimes especially at his Mum.

Because his Mum never really wanted to know his side of the story, his reasons for hiding El in their basement for days. His Mum seems to think that El tricked Mike and his friends in some way, and that she's this dangerous, alien-like person, or something. When really, El has saved their lives. Several times. El isn't scary, at least not towards anyone who is nice to her. El is amazing.

But how would his Mum know, with this "I'm so glad you're safe, let's not talk about all that dark stuff any more, okay?"-attitude. "Will is alive, you are okay, and so are Dustin and Lucas. That's all that matters."

Well, and that's the problem. That's not all that matters to Mike. El should be okay, too. El should be here and learn about all sorts of new things, sit in the La-Z-boy for fun and eat eggos for breakfast. El should have gone to the Snowball with Mike, like he promised her. El

should have been here for Christmas, and his birthday, - and her own birthday, too, if she happened to know when that was.

He felt like he needed some time alone. Or rather, time alone with the walkie, so he could try and talk to her again. It was getting late, anyway.

He leaned away from his Mum, who smiled encouragingly. "Okay. I'll try to be better, Mum.", he says.

He's not sure what that even means.

Day 321

Nancy has been keeping this one bottle of champagne in the fridge for ages. Literally, ages.

She and her friend Barb bought the bottle when they were about his age, saving it for when they'd graduate. Mike never really got what made this one bottle of champagne so special, or how two thirteen-year-old girls even managed to buy a bottle of champagne. Or why the purpose is so special that his Mum let Nancy keep it there and waste space in the fridge like that. Nancy could have just as well kept it in her room all this time. In her wardrobe, or something. It's not like the content would turn bad any time soon, as it is. But, no. The bottle has to stay cold and ready to be popped open for years, so that one day in the not-too-distant future, Nancy gets to celebrate.

Today, Mike is thinking about stealing the bottle.

Not for himself, of course. He really couldn't care less about alcohol. But just so that the looks stop. The sad, guilt-stricken looks Nancy sometimes gets when she opens the fridge and thinks of Barb.

Mike told El about this problem – he's still in contact with her, although she never, ever answers – and it seems like the right thing to do.

"El.", he says, as the hand of his watch just happens to strike 5 pm, "El, I don't know if you're there, but I just did it. I took the bottle from the fridge."

Silence, obviously.

He sighs, scratching his ankle.

"I don't know if she'll even notice it all too soon. I put one of my Mum's wine bottles in there instead, and -"

"MIKE!", an angry voice shouts down from the floor above.

Mike closes his eyes, cringing. "Well, that didn't take long.", he murmurs, annoyed. Maybe he should have done it during some other time of the day, when more people were home. Not just Nancy and him, because Mike can't even pretend to be innocent, now. Which wouldn't work anyway, of course.

"Talk to you later, El.", he says, to no one in particular, because today he's not so sure that she's listening. On a good day, his hopes would be higher. On a terrible day, he's certain that he's always been making a fool out of himself with this.

"Goodbye.", he then adds, anyway. He mumbles the word into his walkie before leaving through the back door. His bike is still outside, so he decides to just make his way over to Lucas' place, seeing what he's been up to.

Lucas is not really up to a lot, it turns out, he's just sitting in his room and reading comics and stuff, so that's what the two of them keep doing. Hanging out with Lucas is mostly pretty easy, even these days, but Mike's thoughts don't do a great job today at staying on the cartoons.

Instead he thinks about the last time he visited Lucas' place, and on how they'd helped his Mum carry some boxes down from the attic. You know, so she could start looking for fabrics and sewing stuff, for their Ghostbusters Halloween costumes.

It's the tiny comments sometimes, the unexpected ones, that hit Mike the hardest: "Oh man." Lucas had said then, finally putting down the heavy boxes, "If El was here, she could just lift that up with her mind for us..."

And when the new x-men collector cards were out, Dustin had

laughed: "Guys, can you believe this? And I thought our lives couldn't possibly get any cooler after meeting someone with superpowers!"

It's not like Mike doesn't say stuff like that either, at times: Hell, his mind is on her so often that it's kind of impossible to keep her out of all their conversations. But still, sometimes these remarks from his friends are coming totally out of the blue for Mike, hitting him like a ton of bricks, and then he has to swallow all that heart break down without making it look too obvious.

What also sucks are the numbers. The tiny elevens everywhere.

Numbers on clocks and watches and computer screens, numbers in his homework and on every eleventh page in every single book he owns, numbers in conversations and on shampoo bottles and muesli bars.

It's not like the numbers bother Mike because he wants to forget her, oh no. No, he's never felt that way, not even for a moment. He knows what he's gained, that week. But the numbers are wrong, it is wrong that her name keeps existing everywhere when she doesn't.

"Mike?"

He looks up and Lucas' mum is standing in the doorway, looking slightly amused but mostly stern.

"Mike, your mum just called me. She says dinner is almost ready, so it'd be nice of you to go home. Especially since she grounded you for this week, anyway."

"Oh.", Mike says, remembering suddenly. "Oh, right."

Lucas laughs standing up with him from the bedroom floor.

"Well, it's not like you've been here very long, so..-"

"-So you better want to make sure that it stays that way, Mike, and hurry a little.", Lucas' mum recommends.

"Just say that you and I had to practise for physics together, or something.", Lucas mutters under his breath, as they make their way

to the front door.

Nancy stays pretty quiet during dinner. Apparently, she doesn't want to make the whole "champagne-bottle-theft" a family issue. Good. The mad looks she shoots at Mike every couple minutes, however, prove that this thing isn't over yet.

About half an hour later, there's a knock on Mike's door.

"Come in."

Nancy enters, looking just as annoyed as before. "Give it back.", she demands, with a voice like ice.

Mike sighs, glaring back. "And what if I don't want to?"

His sister suddenly steps forwards, kicking him against the shin, surprisingly hard.

Mike winces. "Hey!"

He hasn't seen that coming!

"What, do you think this is some sort of joke, or something?", Nancy hisses. All of the sudden, her eyes look glazed and overly bright. "Do you think this is funny, Mike?"

"What?! No!", Mike defends himself, shocked. "It's..- It's not funny Nancy, and that's exactly the problem."

"What exactly is the problem here, Mike? Does it really affect you all that much if I need something that reminds me of Barb, every now and then? Shouldn't I be allowed to do that?"

Mike is staring at his sister like she just grew a braided, green beard. Not just because she's so angry, angrier than he's ever seen her before, maybe, but also because Nancy seems to know exactly why Mike took the bottle in the first place.

"It's... it's making you upset all the time.", Mike mutters, as an explanation.

"Oh, so you are allowed to be upset all the time, and I'm not, Mike?", Nancy replies, taking a step back, her arms still crossed in front of her chest.

Her voice has grown calmer, but it's still rather cold.

"You're allowed to be grieving like crazy, but I'm not allowed to remember Barb in my own ways?"

Mike feels his throat go dry.

"Wh-what?! What does that even -"

"Do you think I don't notice? Mike, you always loved the basement, but nowadays you're obsessed with it! It's the first place you're going in the morning, it's the last place you're going in the evening, you constantly fall asleep down there! I notice that stuff!" She chuckles, humourlessly.

"I also noticed that the blanket fort keeps looking exactly the same as it did last November, as if that sort of tidiness matters, all of the sudden."

Nancy sits down on his bed, eyeing him in a knowing manner. The anger is gone. She mostly looks worried, at this point.

"And whenever Mum's keys make this jingling noise at night, because she's watched one of her true-crime-documentaries yet again and wants to make sure that all the doors are locked, it only takes about ten minutes or so, before I hear your steps in the hallway. Because you just have to make sure that the basement door stays open, right?"

Mike has turned quite pale at her words. His hands prickle uncomfortably. He hadn't been aware of Nancy paying so much attention, and somewhere deep down Mike feels a sort of relief at the knowledge, but mostly he feels embarrassed and weird. His grief about Eleven is extremely personal for Mike, mostly because he feels like no one shares it entirely, and like no one could ever share it this way.

"I don't blame you, alright.", Nancy comments, almost casually, and Mike looks up. "I don't. But Mike, I need you to understand that not

everyone has that, okay? Not everyone has a blanket fort. Some of us just have an unopened bottle of champagne. And I need it back, can I have it?"

Mike nods, sheepishly. He opens the biggest drawer of his desk, pulling the bottle out of it and giving it back to his sister.

"Yeah, but you've got about a million pictures of Barb, haven't you?", Mike ponders, out loud. That seems like a pretty good thing, too.

Nancy shrugs, sadly. "I also have a lot to be sorry for, Mike. Be glad you don't."

Mike knew that Nancy feels somehow responsible for Barb's death, although she's never openly talked about it. He doesn't get it, and he also doesn't get why Nancy assumes he has nothing to regret, himself.

"Sorry.", he says, feeling stupid for stealing the champagne. If someone had done something to the blanket fort, he'd probably also felt furious.

"Don't worry about it.", Nancy answers, smiling weakly. She stands up, the bottle in her hand, and is about to leave the room.

"I'll better put it back in the fridge. It's not even cold any more!", Nancy jokes, quietly.

"Hey, Nancy?", Mike wants to know, as an afterthought. "What are you going to do with it?"

He curiously eyes the bottle in her hands. She looks down at it, too.

"Oh, I... I don't know, really. Maybe I will drink it when I'm graduating. Or I'll open it if..-"

She closes her eyes, one hand on the door frame, "If Barb ever gets to have a real funeral. A real... something."

She shrugs, leaving his room.

Mike's left alone with his thoughts for a while, before craving the basement. He hopes it will be one of the nights when El feels close.

Day 337

Her eyes are blinking back at him in the dimmed lights of his basement. He can see them so clearly, can see the glittery brown of her gaze, like liquid milk chocolate and gold. It's just for an instant. And in the next one, he knows it will be gone, that inner picture of her, and he'll feel like some sort of psycho. He'll be crushed by sadness once more. But for now, it feels real, so warm and bright and real, her eyes on him. He feels fine right then. Complete.

Day 353

Amongst all the chaos, - Bob's death, those Demo-creatures, Will's loss of power over his own body and mind,- amongst all the insanity and fear, Mike is wondering if tonight's the night. He's always wondering if tonight's the night – the one night when El is trying to contact him over the walkie.

And he's scared that she'll do it and he won't be there to answer her, for once.

Mike also wonders if tonight's the night he'll give her up. Give up all hope on her still being out there. He listens to Max say that she finally understands, and that she supposes that El must have been awesome. Of course Max would think so, who in there right mind wouldn't, but it's still... good to hear it. Makes Max look slightly less annoying, after all. Perhaps even alright.

It hurts so much, though. Everything does.

This day feels so awkwardly close to what that other day felt like, the day when it all came down. When she left. It's like the closing of a circle, or something. It's like the universe wants to say: "Wake the fuck up, Michael! Bob was great, and he died! Mrs. Byers didn't deserve that, and it happened anyway! Right in front of her eyes, just like that. Why do you think you are different? Why do you think anything about your situation is so special?"

Because she was special, alright. And he's not just thinking that way because he's some lovesick (yes, he said it: lovesick), hopeless teenager. He's thinking that way about her because it's legitimately

true. She is special. And believing that a force of such good in the world could just be swallowed up by the next best monster out there like she never even happened... Believing that would be the most sinister, cruel, pessimistic, world-hating thing one could possibly take away from all of this.

And yet, Mike sometimes finds himself on the verge of losing it; that hope, that insane connection he feels. Like right now. Like tonight.

A part of him wants to sneak away for just a moment. Just an instant, really. One sentence, thirty seconds would maybe be enough.

"Hello, El, are you there? It's Mike, are you there?", he'd say then, and wait for the never-following answer. And even if he'd only give her the length of a couple heartbeats to reply, he'd still feel better afterwards, like he managed to keep up with their (his) weird tradition, at least. Like he didn't disappoint her. Like, even if he died tonight, he'd at least made sure that she didn't feel like he'd forgotten her, not even for one day.

It is so stupid. He is so stupid.

How could he be so naïve?

Later, when the noise of danger falls over the Byers' cabin, and when everyone gets their weapons ready, Mike feels... Less than the last time. Yes, he's scared, and yes, they might all die right here, and maybe the entire world with them, but... There's a sense of peace, too. The apprehension in his chest doesn't hinder him from thinking that maybe, staying so stubborn all this time wasn't the worst decision of his. Maybe, never quite giving up on El had been the best thing he could possibly have done. Because, if he dies now, he at least has that. He died believing in something wonderful, someone wonderful.

The universe is a strange thing. Maybe, he'll even see her again, in some weird way. Get her back, somehow.

And then -

Then the door opens.

And he does.